

South Korean Women's Social Identity Negotiation: the case of South Korean Women married to Pakistani husbands



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1. Aims of the Research

- To elucidate how Korean women married to Pakistani men develop and negotiate a social identity as the wives of Pakistani immigrants in a society that lacks awareness of Islam.
- Why focusing on Korean women married to Pakistani husbands?
 - The number of Muslim men has been on the rise, and Pakistani men have been the largest among these men (36 in 2000 => 1,955 in 2018)
 - There has been a change in the socio-economic characteristics of Pakistani husbands (since the mid-2000s)
 - These families reveal unique challenges related to differences in cultural practices (mostly religion-related ones)

2. The emergence of Islamophobia

The early 2000's

- 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001
- A series of terrorist attacks/kidnapping against Koreans (e.g. Kim Sun-il) in 2004, 2007

2015

- Koreans' interaction with and exposure to ISIS intensified Islamophobia (e.g. 18-year-old boy)

2016

- A Pakistani-born naturalized Korean applied for becoming a candidate and representative of the ruling party

2018

- 500 asylum seekers from Yemen at *Jeju* island
- Koreans protested and petitioned for the abolishment of the Refugee Law through govt online petition system.

3. Literature Review

- Institutional exclusion (Kwak, 2019)
 - the former Nationality Law prior to 1997
- Negative perception of women marrying out (Cho, 2000; Jung, 2007)
 - taking on their husband's socio-economic status and foreignness (e.g. from immigration staff members)
- Changing religious practices (Kudo, 2009, 2015)
 - some became deeply immersed in their new religion

4. Research Methods

- Semi-structured Interviews
 - Snowball sampling
 - Criteria: a) duration of marriage, b) husbands' country of origin (developing countries), c) migrant husbands – an intermediate level of Korean or English
 - Thematic analysis

Table 1. Profile of Interview Participants

| Korean Women | Occupation | Age Range | Religion | Level of Education | Husband's countries of origin | Husband's Religion |
|--------------|---------------|-----------|--------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| A Reum | Housewife | 20s | Islam | Bachelor Degree | Pakistan | Islam |
| Eun Young | Housewife | 30s | Islam | Bachelor Degree | Pakistan | Islam |
| Ha Na | Self-employed | 30s | Christianity | High school grad. | Pakistan | Islam |
| Min Hee | Housewife | 40s | Christianity | Bachelor Degree | Pakistan | Islam |

5. Research Findings

1 Adapting to Islamic Life

- Those who had converted to Islam at the time of their marriage

“
*I want to wear the hijab all the time. And I know I should. **But I've seen my parents crying so many times whenever I've worn the hijab. They've asked me not to wear it when I'm living near their house. I think they must be embarrassed. People, especially Koreans, have too much prejudice against Islam and they gossip so much about this.** (A Reum, interview in Korean)*”

5. Research Findings

1 Adapting to Islamic Life

- Those who had not converted to Islam but to maintain their original religion, Christianity
 - Being stopped from going to church by her husband
 - Required to Islamic eating habits and ways of life
 - restricted their husbands from passing on his religious faith to their children and bringing their children to the mosque

5. Research Findings

2 Still a Korean daughter

- Being caught between being a daughter of a Korean family and a wife of a Pakistani Muslim husband
- *Jesa*, or ancestor rituals – important ceremonies that Korean perform to honor their ancestors by offering abundant food and paying respect to the ancestors' spirits.

“
*At first my husband tried very hard, but it didn't seem to work. So now, for example, **if my parents eat pork, he tries not to even smell it and looks at it with contempt. My parents are uncomfortable with this.** If he comes to their house, they hide all the pork and prepare to eat what my husband likes, and this makes them very tired. It is quite common to have some alcohol on traditional holidays when all the family are together, but my husband thinks that it is wrong to drink with family. Korean traditional holidays are very big festivals in Korea and like a big party for families, but **he can't get along with people and enjoy the event.**” (Min Hee, interview in Korean) ”*

5. Research Findings

3 Identity Development through Social Network

- Their relationships with many of her friends were not same as before their conversion to Islam.

“ *Not only religion is part of our life, so we do not think of religion as a separate thing [from our lives]. I spend time meeting people who practice the same religion. At the meetings, there are people married to Pakistanis, like my husband, or to Arabs. I get along with these people better than I do with other Koreans (Eun Young, interview in Korean)* ”

5. Research Findings

3 Identity Development through Social Network

- Established a strong tie with other Korean women married to Pakistani husbands as a way to deal with alienation from their wider family networks and acquaintances

- Often joined informal women's gatherings that occurred after mosque services or that were held elsewhere
- Created online blogs to tackle discrimination and exclusion with respect to the negative perception and to the treatment

5. Research Findings

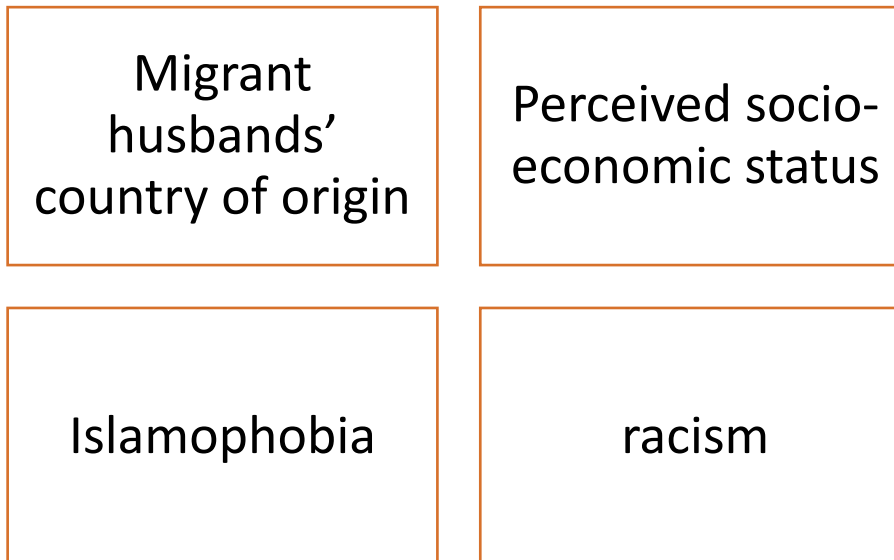
3 Identity Development through Social Network

“ In particular, when they write such stuff on the internet, **the comments are so scary**. There are so many bad comments about it, probably **by those who are really sensitive about pure Korean blood and stuff like that**. So far, in Korea, there are still lots of people who are very sensitive about this, so we face a lot of hardships, and **those who would like to raise issues hesitate to do so**. (A Reum, interview in Korean) ”

6. Conclusion

- The women were placed in a position to accommodate two different cultural values and practices, with unwanted negative consequences at the family level in the form of intergenerational conflicts

- Factors



6. Conclusion

- Social Attitudes towards Islam

- having the same religion may enhance marital quality, but escalate tensions and conflict btw the women and her parents b/c of the perceived incompatibility btw Muslim husband's desire not to compromise his religious integrity and traditional Korean ceremonies and popular food choices
- In case of those who had not converted to Islam, their association with Islam was seen negatively and serve as a marker of otherness.

❖ Korean wives' conversion or proximity to Islam, and Islamophobia among Koreans play a role in shaping women's interpersonal relationships and contribute to them developing a social identity as the wives of Muslim migrants in a non-Muslim country

- They sought new social spaces in order to avoid alienation from their wider family networks and acquaintances, regardless of their conversion to Islam

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Thank you 😊